

March 7, 2022,

Testimony of James M. Long in Favor of House Bill Number 5356, An Act Concerning Pandemic Pay for Essential Workers.

Dear Esteemed Co-Chairs Julie Kushner and Robyn Porter and Members of the Connecticut General Assembly, Labor and Public Employees Joint Committee.

My name is James Long, I am a Parole Officer 2 assigned to the Connecticut Department of Correction, Parole and Community Services Division, Waterbury Parole District Office. I am a Lead Union Steward for the American Federation of State and County Employees (AFSCME) Local 1565 Connecticut Jail Employees.

I represent approximately 170 Parole Officers and Correctional Counselors who throughout this pandemic have continuously reported to work and have placed themselves and their families at risk. Some of these officers and counselors have been contracted the COVID19 virus on more than one occasion. These Parole Officers and Correctional Counselors are dedicated public employees that provide a valuable service to the Connecticut taxpayer.

The Parole Officers and Counselors assigned to the Board of Pardons and Paroles (BOPP) conducted hearings and revocation hearings that allowed the BOPP Panel Members to make informed parole release decisions in order to release sentenced inmates from Connecticut Prisons to the inmate's community. These same Correctional Counselors and Parole Officers also conducted pardon hearings for the BOPP. These dedicated public servants saved the Connecticut taxpayers monies as these inmates might have not been able to receive a hearing unless they were performing their jobs at their work locations. This location was a Connecticut Correctional Facility or the BOPP Office on 55 West Main Street in Waterbury. These Parole Officers also conducted parole revocation hearings to determine probable cause and to afford these parolee's their due process rights under Connecticut Law.

The Parole Officers and Correctional Counselors assigned to the Department of Correction, Parole and Community Services Division continued to report to their assigned district offices. We were not allowed to telecommute from our residence. These dedicated employees reported to work and performed their assigned duties. The Parole and Community Division had inmates and parolees report to their respective parole officers and these parole officers made sure that these offenders were adhering to their stipulated release conditions. The Parole Officers and Correctional Counselors continued to perform their duties and effect the actual community service release from the Connecticut Correctional Facility to the offender's community. These Parole Officers conducted drug screens in their assigned district offices. The Correctional Counselors set up home investigations and releases for these offenders. Parole Officers transported offenders to residential substance abuse treatment programs. Parole Officers conducted home visits at the Offender's residence. Parole Officer's applied Global Positioning Satellite ankle monitoring ankle bracelets to offenders throughout the pandemic. Also, during the months of January and February 2022 during the COVID19 "Omicron Variant" Parole Officers volunteered to work inside various Connecticut Correctional Facilities on Weekend Shifts and Evening and Midnight Shifts During the week. This was due to these Correctional Facilities were at Critical Emergency Staffing levels.

Again, I would like to reiterate that these Parole Officers and Correctional Counselors provided a valuable service to the residents of the State of Connecticut. I am in Favor of H.B. 5356. Thank You.

I can answer any questions the Labor and Public Employees Committee has for me.

Sincerely,

James M. Long

AFSCME Local 1565 Lead Steward.